

THE LION'S SHARE

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ILLUSTRATIONS BY
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SYNOPSIS.

The story opens at Harvard where Col. Rupert Winter, U. S. A., visiting, saw the suicide of young Mercer. He met Cary Mercer, brother of the dead student. Three years later, in Chicago, in 1906, Col. Winter overheard Cary Mercer apparently planning to kidnap Archie, the colonel's ward, and to gain possession of Aunt Rebecca Winter's millions. A Miss Smith was mentioned apparently as a conspirator. A great financial magnate was aboard the train on which Col. Winter met his Aunt Rebecca, Miss Smith and Archie. Col. Winter learned that the financial magnate is Edwin S. Keatcham. Winter, aided by Archie, cleverly frustrated a hold-up on the train. He took a great liking to Miss Smith, despite her alleged kidnapping plot. Archie mysteriously disappeared in Frisco. Blood in a nearby room at the hotel caused fears for the boy's life. The lad's voice was heard over the telephone, however, and a minute later a woman's voice—that of Miss Smith. Col. Winter and a detective set out for the empty mansion owned by Arnold, a Harvard graduate. They were met with an explosion within. Mercer appeared. He assured Winter that Archie had returned. The colonel saw a vision flitting from the supposedly haunted house. It was Miss Janet Smith. Col. Winter to himself admitted that he loved Miss Smith. Mercer told Winter that Archie had overheard plans for a coup and had been kidnaped. One of Mercer's friends on returning the boy to his aunt had been arrested for speeding and when he returned from the police station to his auto the lad was gone. Mercer confessed he was forcibly detaining Keatcham. Mercer told his life story, relating how Keatcham and his secretary, Tracy, Atkins, had ruined him, the blow killing his wife. Mercer was holding him prisoner in order that he could not get control of a railroad which was the pet project of the father of his college friend, Endicott Tracy. Aunt Rebecca saw Archie in a cab with two men. Then he vanished. She followed in an auto, into the Chinese district and by the use of a mysterious Chinese jade ornament she secured a promise from an influential Chinaman that the boy would be returned. Archie returned and told his story. Atkins, former secretary to Keatcham, being his second kidnaper. Col. Winter and Tracy returned to the "haunted house."

CHAPTER XII.—Continued.

"Or David with his ridiculous little sling going against Goliath," added she. "Very well put, Bertie; only the good advice comes too late; the question now is, how to get out with a whole skin. Surprising as it may be, I expect to—with your help."

"Honored, I'm sure," growled Bertie. "There is one thing I mean to ask you—I haven't, but I shall now. Instead of making it impossible for me to sleep to-night, as you virtuously intended in order to clear your conscience before you tried to pull me out of the trap I've set for myself, suppose you do me a favor, right now."

"You put it so well, you make me ashamed of my moral sense, Aunt Becky; what is it you want?"

"Oh, nothing unbefitting a soldier and a gentleman, dear boy; just this: Cary has to have some money. I mean to give it to Stoves, but you hustled him off in such a rush that I didn't get at him. You know where he is, don't you? You haven't sent him straight back?"

"I can find him, I reckon."

"Then I'll give you the money, at once."

How weak a thing is man! Here was an eminently cool-headed, reasonable man of affairs who knew that paws which had escaped from the fire unsinged had no excuse to venture back for other people's chestnuts; he had expressed himself clearly to this effect to young Tracy; now, behold him as unable to resist the temptation of a conflict and the chance to baffle Atkins as if he were a hot-headed boy in plain shoulder-straps!

"I'll do better for you, Aunt Rebecca," said he. "I'll not only take care of the money, I'll go with him to the house. I can make a sneak from here; and Atkins is safely downstairs at this moment. He may be shadowing me; if he is, perhaps I can throw him off the track."

Thus it befell that not an hour later Rupert Winter was guiding the shabby and noisy rumbustious second time toward the haunted house.

"Nothing foul," said the joyous apprentice to crime; "I called old Cary up and got a furious slating for doing it; but he said there wasn't a watchdog in sight; and the old man had surrendered. He was going to let him into the library on parole."

"You need a guardian," growled the colonel; "where did you telephone? Not in the drug store?"

"Oh, dear, no, not in such a public place; I've a shrinking nature that never did intrude its private, personal affairs on the curious world. I used the 'phone of that nice quiet little restaurant where they gave me a lovely meal but were so long preparing it I used up all the literature in sight, which was the Ladies' Home Journal and a tract on the virtues of Knox's gelatine. When I couldn't think of anything else to do I routed out Cary—I'd smoked all my cigarettes and all my cigars but one which I was keeping for after dinner. And Cary rowed me good and plenty. There wasn't a soul in the room."

"Has any one followed you?"

"Not a man, woman or child, not even a yellow dog. I kept looking round, too."

"It was a dreadfully risky thing to do; you don't deserve to escape; but perhaps you did. Atkins may have come to the Palace for some other purpose and never have noticed you."

"My own father wouldn't have got on to me in that dinky rig."

Winter was not so easy in his mind. But he hoped for the best, since there

was nothing else for him to do. They were in sight of the house now, which loomed against the dim horizon, dark, grimmer than ever. Where the upper stories were pierced with semi-circular arches, the star-sown sky shone through with an extraordinary effect of depth and mystery. All the lighter features of the architecture, carving on pediment or lintel or archivol, delicate iron tracery of rejas, relief of arcature and colonnade—all these the dusk blurred if it did not obliterate; the great dark bulk of the house with its massive buttresses, its pyramidal copings and receding upper stories, was the more boldly silhouetted on the violet sky; yet because of the very flatness of the picture, the very lack of shadow and projection, it seemed unsubstantial, hardly more of reality than the giant shadow it cast upon the hillside. Electric lights wavered and bristled dazzling beams on either side of the street; not a gleam, red, white or yellow, leaked through the shuttered windows of the house. In its blackness, its silence, its determined isolation it renewed, but with a greater force, the first sinister thrill which the sight of it had given the man who came to rifle it of its secrets.

"Lonesome-looking old shanty, isn't it?" said the Harvard boy; "seems almost indecorous to speak out loud. Here's where we cache the car and make a gentle detour by aid of the shrubbery up to the arroyo to the north side of the patio. See?"

He directed the colonel's course through an almost imperceptible opening in the hedge along sharp turns and oblique and narrow ways into a small vacant space where the vines covered an adobe hut. Jumping out, Tracy unlocked the door of this tiny building so that the colonel could run the car inside; and after Winter had emerged again, he re-locked the door. As there was no window, the purpose of the hut was effectually concealed.

"Very neat," the colonel approved; whereat Tracy flashed his smile at him in the moonlight and owned with ingenuous pride that he himself was the contriver of this reticent garage.

From this point he took the lead. Neither spoke. They toiled up the hill, in this part of the grounds less of the nature of a hill than of an arroyo or ravine through which rocks had thrust their rugged sides and over which spiked semi-tropical cacti had sprawled, and purple and white flowered vines had made their own untended tangle. Before they reached the level the colonel was breathing hard, every breath a stab. Tracy, a famous track man who had won his H in a wonderful cross-country run, felt no distress—until he heard his companion gasp.

"Jove! But that hill's fierce!" he breathed, explosively. "Do you mind resting a minute?"

"Hardly,"—the colonel was just able to hold his voice steady—"I have a Filipino bullet in my leg somewhere which the X-ray has never been able to account for; and I'm not exactly a mountain goat!"

"Why, of course, I'm a brute not to let you run up the drive in the machine. Not a rat watching us to-night, either; but I wanted you to see the place; and you seem so fit—"

"You oughtn't to give away your secrets to me, an outsider—"

"You're no outsider; I consider you the treasurer of the band," laughed Tracy. They had somehow come to an unexpressed but perfectly understood footing of sympathy. The colonel even let the younger man help him up the last stiff clamber of the path. He forgot his first chill, as of a witness approaching a tragedy; there was a smile on his lips when the two of them passed into the patio. It lingered there as he stood in the flower-scented gloom. It was there as Tracy stumbled to a half-remembered push-button, wondering aloud what had become of Cary and Kito that they shouldn't have answered his whistle; it was there, still, when Tracy slipped, and grumbled: "What sticky stuff has Kito spilled on this floor?"—and instantly flooded the court with light. Then he saw the black, slimy pool and the long slide of Tracy's nailed sole in it; and just to one side, almost pressing against his own foot, he saw a man in a gray suit huddled into the shape of a crooked U, with his arms limp at his side and his head of iron-gray fallen back askew. The light shone on the broad dome of the forehead. He had been stabbed between the shoulders, in the back; and one side of the gray coat was ugly to see.

"Good God!" whispered Tracy, growing white. "It's Keatcham! They've killed him! Oh, why didn't I come back before!"

CHAPTER XIII.

Whose Feet Were Shod With Silence. "Get out your revolver," ordered the colonel; "look sharp! there may be some one here."

But there was not a sign of life revealed by the search. Meanwhile, Winter was examining the body. His first thought was that Keatcham had tried to escape and had been struck down in his flight. Kito would not



Barred and Locked Like All the Entrances.

scruple at such a deed; nor for that matter, Mercer. But why leave the man thus? Why not dispose of the body—unless, indeed, the assassins had been interrupted. Anyhow, what a horrible mess this murder would make of the affair! and how was he to keep the women out of it! All at once, in the examination which he had been making (while a dozen gruesome possibilities tumbled over one another in his mind) he stopped; he put his ear to the man's heart.

"Isn't he dead?" asked Tracy, under his breath.

"No, he is not dead, but I'm afraid he'll never find it out," returned the colonel, shrugging his shoulders. "However, any brandy handy? And get me some water."

"I know where there is some brandy—I'll get it; there is some water in the fountain—right—Cary!"

"What's the matter?" demanded Cary Mercer in one of the arcade doorways of the patio. "What's happened? The devil! Who did this?" He strode up to the kneeling soldier.

"You are in a position to know much better than I," said the colonel, dryly. "We came this moment; we found this."

"Cary, did you do it?"—the young man laid his hand on Cary's shoulder; his face was ashy but his voice rang full and clear. "If you did, I am sure you had a reason; but I want to know; we're partners in this thing to the finish."

"Thank you, boy," said Cary, gently; "that's good to hear. But I didn't hurt him, Endy. Why should I? We'd got what we wanted."

"Who did?" asked the colonel. "I didn't and Kito didn't. He went away to see his only brother who is sick. He hasn't got back. I don't know who did it; but whoever stabbed him must have done it without warning him; for I didn't hear a sound. I was in the library."

"He's breathing a little, I think," murmured the young man, who was sopping the gray mask of a face while Winter trickled brandy drop by drop into the sagging mouth, "and—look! somebody has tried to rob him; that's a money belt!"

The waistcoat was open and Winter could see, beneath, a money belt with buttoned pockets, which had been torn apart with such haste that one of the buttons had been wrenched off.

"They seem to have been after money," said he; "see! the belt is full of bills; there's only one pocket empty."

"Perhaps he was interrupted," explained Mercer. "Push the brandy, colonel, he's moving his eyelids, huh!"

"We've got to do something to that hole in him, first," said the colonel. "Is there any doctor?"

"I haven't sent for one."

"Tony Arnold might know one we could trust," suggested Tracy. "I can get him over the long distance."

"We want somebody now, this minute," declared the colonel.

"There's Janet Smith," said Mercer, "my sister-in-law; she's Mrs. Winter's

companion; she used to be a trained nurse and a mighty good one; she could be trusted."

Could she? And how the terms of his distrust had changed! He had fought against an answer in the affirmative this morning; now his heart was begging for it; he was cold, with fear lest she wasn't this conspirator's confederate.

"Send for them both," said he, with no sign of emotion.

"I'll call up Aunt Rebecca," said Mercer. "Isn't he reviving? No? Best not move him till we get the wound dressed, don't you reckon, colonel?"

But the colonel was already making a rough tourniquet out of his handkerchief and a pencil to stanch the bleeding. The others obeyed his curt directions; and it was not until the still unconscious man was disposed in a more comfortable posture on the cushions which Tracy brought, that Winter sent the latter to the telephone; and then he addressed Mercer. He took a sealed package from an inner pocket and tendered it, saying: "You know who sent it. Whatever happens, you're a southern gentleman, and I look to you to see that she—they are kept out of this nasty mess—absolutely."

"Of course," returned Mercer, with a trace of irritation; "what do you take me for? Now, hadn't I better call Janet?"

"But if this were to be discovered—" "She wouldn't have done anything; she is only nursing a wounded man whom she doesn't know, at my request."

"Very well," acquiesced the colonel, with a long sigh as he turned away. He sat down, cross-legged, like a Turk, on the flags beside the wounded man. Mercer was standing a little way off. It was to be observed that he had not touched Keatcham, nor even approached him close enough to reach him by an outstretched hand. Winter studied his face, his attitude—suppressed the slightest of starts; Mercer had turned his arm to light another electric bulb and the action revealed some crimson spots on his cuff and a smear on his light trousers above the knee. The lamp was rather high and he was obliged to raise his arm, thus lifting the skirts of his coat which had previously hidden the stain. He did not seem aware that his action had made any disclosure. He was busy with the light. "That'll be better," said he; "I'll go call up Sister Janet."

How had those stains come? Mercer professed just to have entered. Vainly Winter's brain tried to labor through the crazy bewilderment of it all; Mercer spoke like an honest man—but look at his cuffs! How could any outside assassin enter that locked and guarded house?—yet, if Mercer had not lied, some one must have stolen in and struck Keatcham. Kito? But the Jap was out of the house—perhaps! And Janet Smith, what was she doing talking to Atkins? Had she given that reptile any clue? Could he—but it was his opportunity to rescue Keatch-

am, not to murder him—what a confounded maze!

And what business had he, Rupert Winter, who had supposed himself to be an honorable man, who had sworn to support the constitution and the laws of the United States, what business had he to help law-breakers and murderers escape the just punishment of their deeds? He almost ground his teeth. Oh, well, there was one way out, and that was to resign his commission. He would do it this very night, he resolved; and he swore miserably at himself, at his venerable aunt who must be protected at such a sacrifice, at Atkins, at the feebly moaning wretch whom he had not ceased all this while to ply carefully with drops of brandy. "You everlasting man-eater, if you dare to die, I'll kill you!" he snorted.

Thereupon he went at the puzzle again. Before any answer could come to the telephone calls, a low, mournful, inhuman cry penetrated the thick walls. It was repeated thrice; on the third call, Tracy ran quickly through the patio to a side door, barred and locked like all the entrances, released and swung it open and let in Kito. A few murmured words passed between them. The Jap uttered a startled exclamation. "But how can it be? How? no one can get in! And who shall stab him? For why?"

He examined the wounded man, after a gravely courteous salute to Winter; and frowned and sighed. "What did it?" said he; "did you stabbed, take it 'way, he must give stiong pull!" "Whoever did it," said the colonel, "must have put a knee on the man's back and pulled a strong pull, as you say." In speaking the words he felt a shiver, for he seemed to see that red smear above Mercer's knee.

He felt the shiver again when Mercer returned and he glanced at him; there was not a stain on his shining white cuffs; he had changed them; he had also changed his suit of clothes and his shoes. His eyes met the colonel's; and Winter fancied there was a glint of defiance in them; he made no comment, for no doubt a plausible excuse for the fresh clothes was ready. Well, he (Winter) wouldn't ask it. Poor devil! he had had provocation.

For the next half-hour they were all busy with Keatcham.

"He is better," pronounced the Jap; "he will not live, maybe, but he will talk, he can say who hurt him."

"If he can only do that!" cried Mercer. "It is infernal to think that any one can get in here and do such a thing!"

"Rotten," Tracy moaned.

The colonel said nothing.

They were all still working over Keatcham when a bell pealed. Tracy started; but Mercer looked a shade relieved. "They've come," said he.

"They?" repeated the colonel. He scrambled to his feet and gasped.

Miss Smith was coming down the colonnade, but not Miss Smith alone. Aunt Rebecca walked beside her, serene, erect and bearing a small handbag. Miss Smith carried a larger bag; and Tracy had possessed himself of a dress-suit case.

"Certainly, Bertie," remarked his aunt in her softest tone, "I came with Janet. My generation believed in less conveniences."

All the colonel could articulate was a feeble, "And Archie? and Millicent?" "Haley is staying in your room with Archie. Millicent had retired; if she asks for us in the morning we shall not be up. She has an appointment with Janet, but it isn't until half-past eleven. Randall has her instructions."

"But—how did you get here?" Aunt Rebecca drew herself up. "I trust now, Bertie, you will admit that I am as fit as any of you to rough it. If there is one mode of transit I abominate, it is those loathsome, unsanitary, uncivil, joggly street cars; we came as far as the corner in the street cars, then we walked. Did we want to give the number to a cabman, do you suppose? Bertie, have you such a thing as a match about you? I think Janet wants to heat a teapoonful of water for a strychnine hypodermic."

CHAPTER XIV.

From Mrs. Melville's Point of View. The Palace Hotel, San Francisco, March 24, 1906.—My Dear Husband: Although I sent you a postal yesterday, I am writing again to-day to try to keep you in touch with our extraordinary series of events. Nothing has been heard from Archie except the letter, the letter—if he wrote it—which tells nothing except that his kidnappers use the same kind of writing paper as Miss Janet Smith. I grow more suspicious of her all the time. You ask (but of course you wrote before the recent mysterious and tragical occurrences), you ask do I like Miss Smith any better, now that I am thrown with her so closely. No, Melville, I have not the fatal credulity of the Winters! I distrust her more. She has, I admit, an engaging personality; there is a superficial amiability that would be dangerous to one not on her guard. But I am never off my guard with her. I'm sorry to say, however, that your brother seems deceived by

her plausible ways. And, of course, our poor aunt is still her blind dupe. Aunt Rebecca has failed a good deal this last year; she is quite irritable with me, sometimes, but she does not appear to realize the full horror of this kidnapping. Miss Smith actually seems to suffer more; she looks pale and haggard and has no appetite. I do not think it all pretense, either; I dare say much of it is remorse! The situation is dreadful. Sometimes I think Aunt Rebecca will not yield to the demands of these wretches who have our poor boy, and that he will be mutilated or murdered; sometimes I think that they have murdered him already and are writing forged letters to throw us off the track. You can imagine how my nerves are shaken! I have seen hardly anything of the city; and of course have not gone into society at all. Indeed, I have met only one pleasant person; that was the secretary of the great financier, Mr. Edwin Keatcham, who was here, next to us. The secretary is a pleasing person quite come in appearance. I met him here in the court where he nearly knocked me over; and he apologized profusely—and really very nicely, using my name. That surprised me, but he explained that they had been on the train with us. Then I remembered him. His name is Horatio Atkins; and he is very polite. He is on a two weeks' vacation and came here to see Mr. Keatcham, not knowing he was gone. He was really most agreeable and so sympathetic about poor dear Archie. He agreed with me that such a nervous temperament as Archie's suffers much more from unkindness. I could see, in spite of his assumed hopefulness, that he shared my fears. He has met quite a number of our friends. He may (through Mr. Keatcham) be a most valuable acquaintance. Didn't you tell me, once, that Keatcham was the leading benefactor of the university?

He (Mr. Atkins) got his vacation on account of his health; and he is going to southern California. I don't wonder. I have never suffered more than in this land of sunshine! It is not so much the cold of the air as the humidity! Do pray be cautious about changing to your summer underwear. Don't do it! I nearly perished, in the bleak wind yesterday, when I tried to visit a few shops. Be sure and take the cough medicine on the second shelf of our bathroom medicine closet; don't mistake rheumatism liniment for it; they are both on the same shelf; you would better sort them out. You are so absent-minded, Melville, I haven't a peaceful day when I'm away from you; and do heaven's sake try to bow to Mrs. Farrell and call her by her right name! You certainly have been to the president's house often enough to know his wife on the street; and I don't think that it was a good excuse which you gave to Prof. Dale for calling "Good morning, Katy!" to Mrs. Dale (who was born a Schuyler and is most punctilious) that you mistook her for our cook!

I miss you very much. Give my love to all our friends and be sure to wear your galoshes (your rubbers, you know) when the campus is wet, whether it is raining or not.

Your aff. wife,
M. WINTER.

THE SAME TO THE SAME.

The Palace Hotel, March, 25, 10 P. M.—My Dear Husband: What do you think has happened? I am almost too excited to write. Archie is back! Yes, back safe and sound, and absolutely indifferent to all appearances, to all our indescribable sufferings on his account! He walked into the parlor about six or a little after, grinning like an ape, as if to disappear from the face of the earth and come back to it were quite the usual thing. And when we questioned him, he professed to be on his word not to tell anything. And Bertie upheld him in this ridiculous position! However, I was told by the detective whom Bertie employed, rather a decent, vulgar, little man, that they (Bertie and he) had cornered the kidnappers and "called their bluff," as he expressed it; but I'm inclined to think they got their ransom from our unfortunate, victimized aunt who is too proud to admit it, and that they probably managed it through Miss S—. I know they called up the room to know if the boy was back; and I puzzled them well, I fancy, by saying he was. I may have saved our poor aunt some money by that; but I can't tell, of course. Melville, I am almost sure that Miss J. S.—is at the bottom of it, whatever the mystery is. I am almost sure that, not content with blackmailing and plundering auntie, Miss S— is now making a dead set at poor, blind, simple-hearted Bertie! I have reasons which I haven't time to enumerate. Bertie will hardly hear a word of criticism of her patently; in fact, I have ceased to criticize her to him or to Aunt Rebecca—ah, it is a lonely, lonely lot to be clear-sighted; but nonetheless oblige. But often during the last few days I have thought that Cassandra wasn't enough pitied.

Your aff. wife,
M.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)